



Housing Options Tool: *A Web-Based Tool to Connect Clients to Affordable Housing Options*



Communities across the country have recognized the need for improved systems to help homeless and at-risk individuals and families access housing options and appropriate services more efficiently. In the homeless service delivery system, the path to housing is often a confusing mix of very specific entrance and eligibility criteria and multiple applications. Navigating the requirements and restrictions for housing or prevention opportunities can be challenging for case managers and even more difficult for those who are trying to access the assistance. There is often no clear way for clients, case managers, or providers to identify the most appropriate housing programs, make informed choices, and provide accurate referrals. Additionally, funders and system planners have no concrete data to show who is or is not being housed in our communities.

The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) has created a web-based tool, the Housing Options Tool (HOT), designed to streamline the process of connecting clients with the prevention resources and/or housing options that may best meet their needs. CSH's primary objectives in designing the HOT were to: create a simple and efficient means for providing complete listings of permanent housing and prevention options for clients and case managers; and to develop mechanisms for ranking housing options to help case managers and clients identify and target their referrals and housing interventions more effectively.

The CSH Consulting Group can deliver tailored consulting services to enable communities to create and launch customized Housing Options Tools appropriate for local needs and goals. These consulting services include: a comprehensive system mapping, documenting a community's housing options and entrance criteria based on the housing inventory, Continuum of Care information, and other available data; the design and development of the dynamic on-line tool; provision of user training to ensure effective implementation; and customization based upon community needs. CSH has created tools for the State of Indiana (the Indiana Housing Opportunity Planner & Evaluator) and the City of Chicago (the Housing Options Survey Tool). Both tools, described in more detail on the following page, focus on triage and assessment, as well as screening for eligibility for prevention and housing options. A sample version of the HOT can be viewed at www.housingoptionstool.org.

HOT utilizes basic information covered in most existing agency intake forms to generate a ranked list of housing categories that are appropriate given the particular characteristics of a client. Although the tool provides the housing categories in a ranked order, the tool will always include all options for which a client is eligible. Each housing category includes a link to contact information for specific housing programs in a given jurisdiction.

The Housing Options Tool (HOT) includes the following features:

- ***Streamlined Access to Housing and Other Resources:*** By completing a short, web-based survey a case manager and/or client gains access to a ranked list of housing options for which they appear to be eligible. In addition to existing affordable and supportive housing options, the HOT includes screening and eligibility assessment tools for prevention resources such as the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP). This feature is designed to provide persons in housing crisis with information about HPRP-related resources and to provide case managers with a simple, consistent way to evaluate eligibility for this new resource. Each tool is tailored to fit the needs of a specific jurisdiction.
- ***Systems Data:*** The HOT aggregates user statistics which can reveal critical data about system gaps. For example, it is possible to determine that in a given system chronically homeless single males with a criminal background are eligible for an average of ten housing options while single mothers with mental illness are eligible for an average of twenty. The HOT does not store any identified client information. HOT may be linked to HMIS systems, depending on the vendor and the jurisdiction.
- ***One-Click Referrals and Applications:*** Housing referral and application data can be sent directly from the HOT to a relevant housing option or program. In addition, housing and program applications can be made directly accessible via the HOT as well. If a jurisdiction has an online portal for affordable and/or supportive housing listings, CSH staff can explore the potential and feasibility of adding real-time availability information to HOT by importing those listings.

Customizing HOT for your Jurisdiction

To explore the possibility of the CSH Consulting Group creating a customized version of the Housing Options Tool in your community, including a guided webinar, please contact Liz Drapa or Stephanie Hartshorn at housingtool@csh.org or 312.332.6690.



HOT Examples: The Housing Options Tool in Chicago and Indiana

City of Chicago – Chicago Housing Options Survey Tool (HOST) –
www.chicagohousingoptions.org

State of Indiana – Indiana Housing Opportunity Planner & Evaluator (IHOPE) –
www.indianahousingoptions.org

Communities across the country are transforming their homeless service delivery systems to end homelessness. In Chicago and the State of Indiana, specific initiatives call for a transformation to make the homeless service and housing system work better for the client – to house persons who are homeless quickly and into the most appropriate intervention. To assist in this system change, CSH worked with our partners to create customized Housing Options Tools (HOT).

Who HOT Benefits

HOT tracks every interaction with the survey and provides general, aggregate data such as household composition, disability type, housing status, and income. HOT also tracks which clients are eligible for which housing options – and who is being screened out by our provider criteria or general community barriers. For persons who are homeless, the HOT provides accurate referrals. For providers, the HOT empowers case managers to talk with their clients about the programs that best fit their needs - as those are ranked highest - along with those that might not fit all their housing and/or service needs and why that might be true. For communities, the HOT provides critical information on housing eligibility and provides information that aids in understanding system barriers. HOT also assesses for housing and prevention resource eligibility. For CSH, the tool and its data enable us to learn more about persons who are placed in housing and service interventions.

Use to Date

HOST launched in Chicago in April 2009 and IHOPE launched in Indiana in October 2009. As of January 2010, more than 5,500 surveys have been completed.

The Chicago Housing Options Survey Tool (HOST)

As of the third quarter of 2009, the City of Chicago required that a HOST survey be completed for all clients entering an emergency shelter or interim housing staffed with case managers. Case managers are also required to refer clients to at least three options. HOST insures that each client is provided with a complete ranked list of all housing options for which he or she meets baseline eligibility criteria. Even options that do not appear to be the best fit for a particular client will still appear on the list. This process serves to increase equity across the homelessness system as well as provide quicker access to critically important information. Screening for HPRP is being added in February 2010 and connection to real-time availability of permanent supportive housing units is expected by Spring 2010.

The Indiana Housing Opportunity Planner & Evaluator (IHOPE)

As of fourth quarter 2009, the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) implemented IHOPE as the key element of its statewide HPRP triage system. IHOPE assists IHCDA subcontracted agencies to identify eligible persons and determine the most appropriate level of assistance for them; the tool is being expanded to include all housing options in Indiana. Throughout 2010, CSH and IHCDA will conduct a series of forums and trainings along with the launch of the expanded tool in order to determine the most efficient way to conduct systems triage. IHOPE will serve as the lynchpin of the new system, with other processes to be determined in conversations with providers throughout the state. A formal evaluation of IHOPE is scheduled to begin later this year.

Modifications and Reports

Since CSH developed the tool, it remains nimble and easy to modify. The ability to make rapid and frequent enhancements is an extremely important feature of the HOT. CSH provides continuous training and technical assistance to all providers. CSH also provides monthly data reports to each community.



The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) is a national non-profit organization and community development financial institution that helps communities create permanent housing with services to prevent and end homelessness. Founded in 1991, CSH advances its mission by providing advocacy, expertise, leadership, and financial resources to make it easier to create and operate supportive housing. For more information about the CSH Consulting Group, please visit www.csh.org/CSHConsultingGroup or contact consulting@csh.org.